THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) The number of Passport Offices opened in the country during the last three years, State-wise are as folows:—

Passport Office	State	Year of opening
Ghaziabad	Uttar Pradesh	1997
Visakhapatnam	Andhra Pradesh	1997
Thane	Maharashtra	1997
Pune	Maharashtra	1998
Srinagar (re-opened)	Jammu & Kashmir	1997

(b) The opening of new passport offices is governed by certain criteria such as the location of existing offices, volume of applications from a particular region and regard to the recommendations of the Standing Committee of Parliament of External Affairs that there should be atleast 50,000 applications per annum from an area for a new passport office to be opened. While considering such proposals the availability of staff in the Central Passport Organisation is also taken into account. At present there is no proposal to open any new Passport Office in the near future.

Inhuman behaviour to Indian soldiers during Kargil war

†2369. SHRI SATISH CHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether Government have raised the issue of tortuous and inhuman behaviour meted to our soldiers by the Pakistan during Kargil was, before the International Human Rights Commission;

(b) if so, the results thereof; and

(c) whether this issue has been raised by anyone other than Government?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Government conveyed the anguish and deep anger of the Indian people to the Foreign Minister of Pakistan during his visit to Delhi on June 12,1999. Government underlined that these acts constitute a gross violation of the Geneva Convention, and demanded of Pakistan that the guilty be identified and punished.

The attention of the international community was drawn to these brutal acts of Pakistan including through our statement to the UN General Assembly in New York on September 22, 1999. Government will continue to take up the matter in appropriate international forums.

Passport Office at Siliguri

2370. SHRI DAWA LAMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether there is any proposal to open a Passport Office at Siliguri; and

(b) if so, the time-frame thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, a proposal to open a Passport Application Collection Centre at Siliguri is under the consideration of the Government.

Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails

2371. SHRI N. THALAVAI SUNDARAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether it is a fact that 19 fishermen from Kanyakumari Districts of Tamil Nadu are in Pakistani jails; and

(b) if so, what steps are being taken by Government for the early release of the Indian Fishermen from Pakistani jails?